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FM WASHINGTON
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AIG 6007
B T
NATO CONFIDENTIAL FROM WASHINGTON
NADA/ASSESSMENT/APR 02/MFA WASHINGTON
SUBJECT: SOVIET FOOD SUPPLY DIFFICULTIES

SUMMARY

ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET FOOD SITUATION IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DUE TO LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF RELIABLE INFORMATION AND RESTRICTIONS ON OBSERVATION CAPABILITY OF AMERICAN PERSONNEL. IT SEEMS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT IN PART AS A RESULT OF THE 1975 GRAIN FAILURE SOME SIGNIFICANT SHORTAGES HAVE EXISTED AND ARE STILL NOT FULLY OVERCOME. WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND RUMORS, ADMITTEDLY LIMITED IN NUMBER AND SCOPE, OF TIGHT FOOD SUPPLIES, PARTICULARLY OF MEATS, WITH THE WORST CONDITIONS, AS USUAL, BEING INDICATED FOR NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS. WE CANNOT, HOWEVER, STATE HOW GENERAL OR HOW PROLONGED THESE SHORTAGES MAY BE. WE CONSIDER IT HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT CONDITIONS IN AFFECTED LOCATIONS CONTINUE TO BE BAD BY WESTERN STANDARDS AND PERHAPS EVEN POOR BY COMPARISON WITH THE SOVIET SUPPLY SITUATION DURING MUCH OF THE 1973-75 PERIOD. THE EVIDENCE IS NOT UNIFORM NOR IS THERE AGREEMENT THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION IS GREATLY DIFFERENT THAN IN PREVIOUS YEARS. THERE HAVE BEEN SOME SCATTERED REPORTS OF UNREST, BUT THEY DO NOT CONSTITUTE A SERIOUS IMMEDIATE PROBLEM FOR THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP.

1. ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF SOVIET FOOD SITUATION REMAINS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT DUE TO THE LIMITED AVAILABILITY OF RELIABLE INFORMATION AND RESTRICTIONS ON OBSERVATION CAPABILITY OF AMERICAN PERSONNEL. FOOD SUPPLY OBSERVATIONS AND REPORTS (CONFIRMED AND UNCONFIRMED) AND EVEN IMPORTANT RUMORS CAN GIVE SOME SELECTIVE FLAVOR OF ATTITUDES AND, IN CONDITIONS OF SOVIET SOCIETY, OFTEN HAVE A FACTUAL BASE. THERE CONTINUE TO BE INDICATIONS

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OF LOCAL, BUT PERHAPS WIDESPREAD, SHORTAGES OF MAINLY MEAT AND VEGETABLES, WITH THE SITUATION MORE UNFAVORABLE IN VILLAGES AND SMALLER CITIES IN CERTAIN LOCALITIES THAN IN MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS. A RECAP OF THE INDICATIONS OF THIS SITUATION AVAILABLE TO US AND OUR COMMENTS ON SOME OF THE CAUSES FOLLOW.

2. A KNOWLEDGEABLE SOVIET SOURCE TOLD US IN MARCH THAT THE MEAT SITUATION IN THE USSR MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO RETURN TO QTE NORMAL UNQTE IN ABOUT SIX MONTHS. OTHER SOURCES REPORTED SHORTAGES OF MEAT, SAUSAGE AND POTATOES IN MINSK AND PSKOV IN MID-FEBRUARY. A RECENT VISITOR TO TALLINN AND RIGA LIKewise FOUND MEAT, VEGETABLE AND POTATO SHORTAGES. IN FEBRUARY, AN OBSERVER FOUND ADEQUATE MEAT SUPPLIES IN RIGA, MAINLY PORK, BUT VENTSPILS WAS BARREN OF MEAT. NOVOSIBIRSK, AKADEMGORODOK AND IRKUTSK IN LATE FEBRUARY HAD VIRTUALLY NO MEAT AVAILABLE AND POOR SUPPLIES OF POTATOES; THERE WERE ADEQUATE VEGETABLE SUPPLIES IN IRKUTSK BUT VIRTUALLY

NONE IN NOVOSIBIRSK. A SOVIET SOURCE RECENTLY COMMENTED THAT IN KOMSOMOLSK-ON-AMUR, NO MEAT AND VEGETABLES HAD BEEN AVAILABLE FOR MONTHS. ANOTHER REPORT BASED ON SOVIET SOURCES CONTACTED IN JANUARY-FEBRUARY FOUND SERIOUS MEAT AND FOOD SHORTAGES IN CITIES IN THE KAZAKH,

KIRGIZ, LATVIAN, LITHUANIAN, AND MOLDAVIAN REPUBLICS, AND IN THE NORTHERN PARTS OF THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC, I.E., YAROSLAV, PERM OBLAST, AND ARKHANGELSK. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SITUATION IN THE UKRAINE WAS MIXED, WITH SOME OBLASTS, DONETSK AND ODESSA, ALL APPARENTLY HAVING GOOD SUPPLIES.

3. THERE HAVE BEEN UNCONFIRMED REPORTS CONCERNING UNREST OVER THE FOOD SITUATION. ONE REPORT SUGGESTS THAT THE BREZHNEV SPEECH IN TULA ON JANUARY 18 WAS PROMPTED BY ACTIVE WORKER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LACK OF GOODS.
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TWO REPORTS IN LATE FEBRUARY INDICATED THAT SEVERE SHORTAGES OF MEAT AND IN SOME INSTANCES POTATOES EXIST OUTSIDE MOSCOW. BOTH LINKED THESE AND OTHER FOOD SHORTAGES WITH UNREST AT TULA, WHICH THEY SAID HAD INCLUDED WORK STOPPAGES. ONE OF THESE REPORTS ALSO CITED SHORTAGES AT VOLOGDA WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO DEMONSTRATIONS AT A LOCAL PARTY MEETING WHICH WAS FINALLY DISPERSED BY MILITIA. SOME MOSCOW STUDENTS RETURNING FROM WINTER HOLIDAYS HAVE REPORTED SEVERE MEAT SHORTAGES IN OUTLYING AREAS. WE HAVE HEARD REPORTS OF UNREST IN LATVIA OVER THE FOOD SITUATION. SOME WEEKS AGO THERE WAS ALSO AN UNCONFIRMED REPORT THAT WORKERS IN KRASNOMAISKIY HAD REFUSED TO WORK UNTIL THEY WERE SUPPLIED MEAT AND THE GOVERNMENT WAS SAID TO HAVE IMMEDIATELY SHIPPED IN YUGOSLAV POULTRY QTE BY AIR UNQTE. ON THE OTHER HAND, A QUICK CHECK OF THREE WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS YIELDED NO NEW CONSCIOUSNESS ON THE SUBJECT OF FOOD.

4. PERIODIC OBSERVATIONS AT MOSCOW RAILWAY STATIONS INDICATE MANY PEOPLE COMING INTO THE CITY FROM OUTLYING AREAS TO PURCHASE FOOD, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE IT IS IN DEFICIENT SUPPLY AT HOME. SOME OTHER OBSERVERS CONSIDER THIS PHENOMENON MORE STRIKING THIS YEAR THAN LAST. MOSCOW AUTHORITIES ARE ALSO SAID TO HAVE IMPOSED A SECOND NON-MEAT DAY IN RESTAURANTS EACH WEEK. IF TRUE, THIS HAS PROBABLY BEEN INSTITUTED ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY AND IS INDICATIVE OF FURTHER NEED AND EFFORTS TO STRETCH MEAT SUPPLIES. ON THE OTHER HAND, MOSCOW'S COLLECTIVE MARKETS GENERALLY SEEM WELL STOCKED AND ARE NO MORE CROWDED THAN USUAL.

5. THE PICTURE IS NOT UNIFORM. THE UZBEK REPUBLIC FOOD SITUATION IS QUITE ADEQUATE, ACCORDING TO SOVIET SOURCES. RECENTLY, VISITORS TO CENTRAL MARKETS THERE AND ELSEWHERE IN SUCH MAJOR CITIES AS BAKU, YEREVAN, TASHKENT, AND SAMARKAND FOUND GOOD MEAT, VEGETABLES, AND FRUIT SUPPLIES. CONFIDENTIAL

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6. COMMENT: THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE PRESENT

FOOD SUPPLY SITUATION ARE SEVERAL. WINTER TRADITIONALLY IS A DIFFICULT TIME FOR THE SOVIET CONSUMER AS THE FLAWS IN THE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM BECOME EXACERBATED, PARTICULARLY IN NON-METROPOLITAN AREAS WHICH ARE NOT AGRICULTURALLY STRONG. CHANNELS ARE OF COURSE BETTER DEVELOPED TO MOVE PRODUCTS TOWARD MAJOR CITIES THAN THEY ARE TO REDISTRIBUTE THEM ELSEWHERE. MEAT AVAILABILITIES, ALTHOUGH PROBABLY UP FROM THE MID-1976 LEVELS, ARE BELOW 1975 LEVELS, PARTICULARLY PEAK SUPPLIES FOLLOWING THE LATE 1975 DISTRESS SLAUGHTERINGS WHICH TEMPORARILY ENHANCED LAST WINTER'S SUPPLY. VEGETABLES WERE BADLY AFFECTED BY THE MID-OCTOBER FREEZE. DISTRIBUTION PRACTICE, MAINLY FOR POLITICAL REASONS, GIVES PRIORITY TO SUPPLY OF THE MAJOR CITIES. EVEN SO, CABBAGE AND POTATOES ARE SOMETIMES UNAVAILABLE AT OBSERVED MOSCOW STATE OUTLETS. A GENERALLY INEFFICIENT DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM CAN OF COURSE EXPLAIN SUCH PROBLEMS AND THIS YEAR, FURTHERMORE, TRANSPORTATION HAS BEEN SUCH A PROBLEM THAT THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE RAILROADS HAS BEEN PUBLICLY CRITICIZED.

7. THE LIMITED SCOPE AND RELIABILITY OF INFORMATION AND THE RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON OBSERVATION LIMIT OUR ABILITY TO ASSESS AUTHORITATIVELY THE OVERALL SOVIET FOOD SITUATION. WE CONCLUDE FROM COMMENTS WE HAVE HEARD, MANIFESTATIONS WE HAVE OBSERVED, CONTINUED SOVIET MEAT IMPORTS, APPARENT LIMITATIONS ON CONSUMPTION, ETC., HOWEVER, THAT THERE HAS BEEN A CONTINUING PROBLEM WHICH IS EXACERBATED IN SOME AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. THE FACT THAT THIS HAS APPARENTLY NOT PRESENTED A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE REGIME STEMS IN PART FROM THE POWER WHICH THE LATTER POSSESSES TO INTIMIDATE OR SUPPRESS MANIFESTATIONS OF DISCONTENT. SOME SOVIET OFFICIALS DENY THAT THERE CONFIDENTIAL

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IS A SHORTAGE, WHEREAS OTHERS SAY THAT IT IS ON THE WAY

TO SOLUTION. WHATEVER THE DEGREE TO WHICH A FOOD SHORTAGE EXISTS, WE SEE NO INDICATION THAT IT PRESENTS A SERIOUS AND CURRENT POLITICAL DANGER TO THE SYSTEM.

8. THE RECORD 1976 GRAIN CROP, ABOUT 224 MILLION TONS, ENABLES THE SOVIETS TO AGAIN EXPAND THE OUTPUT OF LIVE-STOCK PRODUCTS. THIS EXPANSION, ALREADY UNDERWAY, REDUCES LIVESTOCK SLAUGHTER AS YOUNG ANIMALS ARE RETAINED TO REBUILD HERDS, BUT SHOULD PROVIDE LARGER SUPPLIES IN 1977-78.

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